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A LETTER

FROM

A GENTLEMAN at *Mahon*,

TO ——

K. L—, d—

Giving an ACCOUNT of the ESCAPE and MARRIAGE of Three NUNS of the Order of *St. Clare*.

EDINBURGH:

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BRITISH MUSEUM

SIR,

SINCE I was favoured with your obliging Letter, nothing remarkable has happened here, but a very comical Adventure, of which I ſhall give you an Account, as it may divert you for a little, and afford ſome Entertainment to our good Friend Mr. *G*——.

Among the Religious Houſes in this Iſland, there are two Nunneries, into which Parents put their Daughters when they have no Proſpect of getting Husbands for them, or when they are ſo poor as not to have Fortunes to give with them.

They are ſent to theſe Nunneries when very young, and have no Hopes of getting free but by Death.——At the Age of 17, they take a Vow of Chaſtity, of Obedience to the Mother *Abbeſs*, and of

Re-

Retirement from the World. To inforce the firſt Part of their Vow, they have no Acceſs to ſee thoſe of our Sex, *Holy Prieſts excepted*, but thro' an Iron-grate; and there they have the Liberty of converſing with them.

Two Officers of *O'Farrel*'s Regiment, happening to go out of Curioſity to ſee and converſe with the Nuns of *St. Clare*, ſaw Two whom they admired very much, and, in ſhort, fell deſperately in Love with them: They declared their Paſſion to the Girls, whoſe Heads being ſtuffed with nothing but Romances, which they read in the Convent, look'd upon them as two adventerous Knights come to deliver them from their enchanted Priſon, and gave them all the Encouragement they could wiſh for.—The Gentlemen declared themſelves upon Honour, and that they would marry them whenever they got them out. Many were

the Schemes they formed to evade the Vigilance of the old Maids, their Keepers, to pick the Locks, and get over the Walls; and, as Love ſurmounts all Difficulties, they got a falſe Key made to the Garden-Door, and having given the Slip in the Dark to the Nun who locks them up when they go to Bed (for they all ſleep in one Room) they got down into the Garden about 12 at Night, where they found the two Gentlemen ready to receive them, who, by Means of Ladders, had got over a Wall 20 Foot high to get at them, and by the ſame Way conveyed the Ladies out: But, how ſurprized were the Gentlemen, when inſtead of only the Two that they expected, they found a Third who was a Volunteer. This was the Confident of the other Two; and, tho' ſhe knew of no-body that would give her Protection, yet was reſolved, at all

Events,

Events, to get free from Priſon; thinking nothing could happen to her ſo bad, as to be kept in the Nunnery for Life. This bold Adventurer was the chief Promoter of the Others making their Eſcape, on Purpoſe that ſhe might have an Opportunity of coming out along with them.—Tho' the Nunnery is in the Middle of the Town, and every Way ſurrounded with Houſes, and tho' it was clear Moon-ſhine, Providence had ſo ordered it, that No-body obſerved them ſcaling the Walls, otherways, the Conſequences might have proved very fatal; For the Gentlemen had gone well arm'd, and reſolved, at any Rate, to carry off their Prizes.

Next Morning, upon miſſing of the Nuns; the whole Convent was in an Uproar.---- The Town took the Alarm,—and all was in Confuſion, not knowing where they

they were; but, concluding they were among the *Engliſh*, none elſe being ſo wicked as to harbour them: For the People here conſider the carrying them off as the greateſt height of Impiety, as they were Perſons who had dedicated themſelves to the Service of God.

The Gentlemen immediately applied to Mr. — an *Engliſh* Clergyman, to marry them, who acquainted them, that if the Ladies were reſolved to continue *Roman Catholicks*, he would not take upon him to marry them. For, tho' he did not look upon the Vow of Chaſtity, which they had taken, to be lawful in itſelf; yet, as long as theſe Ladies continued of that Perſuaſion, it would be impoſſible for them to think ſo, and that they might look upon any future Engagements they entred into with them, not to be binding, as they were contrary to their prior

Vow;

Vow: And therefore, when he waited upon the Ladies, he asked them, If they did not look upon the Vow which they had taken, of renouncing the World, and of Chaſtity, to be binding upon them? To which they readily replied, That they did not, for that they looked upon it as unlawful in itſelf; and that it was ſo contrary to the Dictates of their own Natures, that they could not believe it was enjoined them by the God of Nature; which made them have ſome Doubts of that Religion which impos'd ſuch Cruelties and Hardſhips upon them: And that therefore they were deſirous to be inſtructed in the Principles of the Proteſtant Religion. They added, That the Vow was extorted from them by Force; for when they were 17 Years old, the Age that they came under theſe Engagements, they informed their Father Confeſſor of

their

their Averſion to that recluſe Sort of Life, and their Reſolution of not taking the Vow: Who told them, If they refuſed the Vow, and came out of the Nunnery, that their Relations would put them to Death; and upon his acquainting the Mother *Abbeſs* with it, ſhe ſhut them up in a dark Dungeon, and fed them only with a little Bread and Water, and whip'd them every Day with a Cat of Nine-tails, till ſhe forced them into a Compliance. This is the Way they take to fill up their religious Houſes, and without it they would be quite empty: For what the Ladies further obſerved, is doubtleſs true, that there is hardly a Nun there, under 40, but would come out if ſhe could.

Mr. —— was 5 or 6 Days employed in inſtructing them in the Principles of the Proteſtant Religion, and ſhewing them the Difference betwixt that and the *Roman Ca-*

tholick; all which Time the *Romiſh* Clergy had, by the General's Orders, free Acceſs to them, that if they could prevail upon them to continue *Roman Catholicks*, or return to their Convent, they ſhould be left entirely to the Freedom of their own Will. But Love turned the Scale in Mr. —— Favour; and what he ſaid, had more Influence upon them than that of ſix Prieſts, who were all the Time thundering Damnation againſt them, if they became Proteſtants: For, amidſt all their ſurrounding *Anathema's*, they made a formal Renunciation of the Errors of the *Roman Catholick* Religion, and declared themſelves Proteſtants.

The Prieſts preſs'd upon them to return back to their Convent, from the Obligation they lay under from their Vow; and as for any Thoughts they might have of Marriage, that

that *that* was impoſſible, they being already married to Jeſus Chriſt. However, when the Prieſts found that the Ladies were deſirous of being inſtructed in the Proteſtant Religion, they offered, if they would continue *Roman Catholicks*, to give them immediately a Diſpenſation from their Vows, without waiting for one from *Rome* (which by the By was not in their Power to do) and to marry them to whom they pleaſed. But Mr. —— took upon him the Power of being Pope for once, in giving the two Ladies a Diſpenſation from their Vows; and married them the Day after they had declared themſelves Proteſtants.—From the Time of their Eſcape, till they were married, they continued in the Lodgings of their two Lovers;—— but the Doors and Windows of the Room where they lay, were ſealed up every Night, before the Prieſts, and opened

before

before them in the Morning, in order to ſatisfy their Relations that theſe Gentlemen had no Communication with them; when their Marriage put an End to this Ceremony, dreadful was the Outcry, for their Relations thought that there was more Occaſion for Shut Doors than ever; and they never will look upon them in the Light of theſe Gentlemens Wives.——The unmarried Lady was put in the Maſter of —— Houſe, under the Care of his Lady, where ſhe immediately got a Crowd of Admirers, and was married in a Month's Time to another Officer.

It is not to be conceived into what a Ferment this Adventure threw the whole Iſland: All their Relations, (which are the beſt Families in the Place) all their Magiſtrates, and all their Clergy, were conſtantly haraſſing the General, complaining of the

the Sacrilege that was committed, and petitioning, that they might either be returned back to their Convent, or delivered up into their Relations Hands; they did not ſay, to put them to Death, but doubtleſs that would have been their Fate, if either of theſe Demands had been granted. When they found that they could not ſucceed with him, they laid a Scheme of making Repriſals, and of carrying them off: For one Evening, taking Advantage of one of the Gentlemen being abroad, and having brib'd one of the Servants; his Wife's Mother, and ſome of her Relations, came into his Houſe, and carried her away by Force. Their Deſign was, to have ſent her in a Boat to *Majorca*, which is but a very little Way from this Iſland, and there put her into the Inquiſition. The Gates of the Town being immediately ſhut, and Guards placed

placed to ſuffer No-body to go out, a Search was made for two Days, but all to no Purpoſe: And till Orders were iſſued to put all thoſe, concerned in carrying her off, in Priſon, and they were threatned with Death, they would not produce her; at laſt, Fear compell'd them to deliver her up. They kept her in Bed all the Time ſhe was among them, and would not ſuffer her to put on her Clothes, leſt ſhe ſhould run away from them, or get to the Windows, and call out to any of the *Engliſh*; but did not uſe her any otherwiſe ill, knowing it would have been retaliated upon them. They brought a Prieſt, to reconvert her, whoſe Endeavours you may believe were all in vain, ſhe had taſted too much of the Sweets of Liberty to think any more of Convents and Cells. One of the Ladies, made a *Spaniſh* Song upon their coming out

of

of the Nunnery, which a Gentleman has turned into *Engliſh*, as follows, to the Tune of, *By* Jove *I'll be free.*

I.

COME all ye young Nuns, who are tir'd of *St. Clare (a)*,
Take me for Example, lay aſide your grave Air;
Give your Cords to the Clergy, to whom they belong *(b)*,
And hope when they uſe them, they may always prove ſtrong.
Throw away your black Veils, and diſplay all your Charms;
The ſure Road to Heaven, is a fond Lover's Arms.

II.

I faſted, I pray'd, told my Beads, and kept Lent,
'Till Eighteen long Years in a Convent were ſpent:
No Proſpect of Freedom, no Hopes to get clear,
'Till bleſt be the Hour that O'FARREL's *(c)* came here.
They mounted our Ramparts, and ſoon got us o'er,
And taught us a Road which we ne'er knew before.

III. Let

(*a*) *St. Clare* is the Name of the Order of Nuns to which they belonged.

(*b*) *Give your Cords*, &c. alludes to a Cord which the Nuns tye about their Middle, to keep their Habit together; one End of which hangs down to their Toes, full of Knots, with which they ought to whip themſelves by way of Mortification: But the Mother Abbeſs, fearing they do, as *Sancho Panca* did, whip the Trees inſtead of their Backs; has an old Surgeon, who comes in twice a Month, and phyſicks and bleeds all thoſe who have too much Health, or too good a Complexion.

(*c*) *O'Farrel's* is the Regiment to which thoſe Gentlemen belong, took the Ladies out of the Convent, and have ſince married them.

III.

Let thoſe who love Bondage be kept in their Cage,
Grow meagre with Faſting, and hoary with Age:
Let them pray to their Saints, confeſs to their Friers;
The firſt are but Wood, and the ſecond are Liars.
Let who will believe them, by *Jove* 'tis not me;
Since, Thanks to O'FARREL's, I'm fairly got free.

IV.

Long live the brave Youths, and Succeſs to the Corps,
Who ſo bravely have ventur'd what none durſt before:
Tho' ſurrounded with Dangers, yet bravely puſh'd on,
And ne'er left the Field, till the Paſs they had won.
May each Youth be bleſt with a Fair in his Arms,
And the gods ſtill protect him from Death and Alarms.

As it is high Time to conclude this long Letter, I ſhall only add, that you may depend upon the Truth of the whole Story, the ſeveral Facts being conſiſtent with my own Knowledge.——Make my Compliments to all Friends, and believe me to be,

D. Sir, 1 JA 64

Yours, &c.

Mahon, May 2.
1749. A—— L——.